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☞ Separate paging is given to this Part in order that it may be filed as a separate compilation.

PART IV.

Miscellaneous Papers.

DILUTE SULPHURIC ACID IN THE TREATMENT OF CHOLERA.

INDIA OFFICE,
London, 18th September 1879.

Statistics and Commerce.
No. 116.

To His Excellency the Right Honorable the Governor General of India in Council.

MY LORD,—I transmit a copy of two letters* from Dr. Henry MacCormac, advocating the use of dilute sulphuric acid as a prophylactic in case of an outbreak of cholera, and I request that Your Excellency will at once take measures for bringing the specific under the notice of the Medical Officers, Civil and Military, in India.

*Dated 26th and 31st August 1879.

I have the honor to be,
MY LORD,
Your Lordship's most obedient humble Servant,

CRANBROOK.

Dated 26th August 1879.

From—H. MACCORMAC, Esq., M. D., Consg. Physician to the Belfast Royal Hospital.

To—The Secretary of State for India.

In common with every one who has paid any attention to the subject, I learn from the public journals that cholera is making and has made destructive ravages among the troops, Native and European, in Afghanistan and the Punjab. I have had an extensive experience of Asiatic cholera, and in the course of it became acquainted with the efficacy of dilute sulphuric acid in the treatment. It occurred to me that a remedy found so useful might prove further appropriate as a means of prevention. Before a disease breaks out in the living organism there is commonly a period of incubation during which the malady does not shew itself but is preparing to do so. This is the time to strike, and thereby, if possible, to hinder the disease from entering. For surely, it is better to prevent than to wait for the appearance of such a scourge. In a public institution to which I am visiting physician, cholera broke out in 1854. Fifty cases occurred almost simultaneously. Out of these, seventeen presently died. At once I placed the whole establishment, consisting of some 300 or 400 persons, under the daily exhibition of one drachm, a large tea-spoonful or so, of dilute sulphuric acid in a small cup of peppermint water. I had, in fact, a large vesselful prepared, so that it was quite a simple matter to give the acid, diluted as thus, to each one in prompt succession. The point I now wish to arrive at is this,—so soon as the members of the establishment came under the influence of the dilute acid—and that I may say was immediately after its administration—no other case of cholera whatever ensued. The facts are quite inexpugnable, and I conceive, justify an immediate message to India, ordering troops and civilians whenever and wherever the dreadful scourge of Asiatic cholera shews its head to be placed under the instant prophylactic efficacy

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of dilute sulphuric acid, given, say, once or even twice daily. Ten parts of water to one of sulphuric acid are found to dilute it sufficiently. Dilute sulphuric acid, as a prophylaxis, is calculated, I believe, to rescue multitudes and avert great suffering. I have adverted to the subject before, and, actuated by a sense of a public duty, would now fain press the matter home afresh.

Dated 31st August 1879.

From—H. MACCORMAC, Esq., M. D., Consg. Physician to the Belfast Royal Hospital.

To—The Secretary of State for India.

I beg to express my extreme satisfaction in respect of your kindness in informing me that you will lay the results of my experience in regard of the prophylactic efficacy of dilute sulphuric acid before the Government of India. I have also to return thanks to the conductors of the medical journals for their goodness in giving publicity to the subject in their columns. In 1832, and since, I have treated between three and four thousand cases of Asiatic cholera. I had not, however, at first ascertained the prophylactic efficacy of dilute sulphuric acid. It is one of the cheapest as well as one of the most powerful of remedies. A pound of sulphuric acid in bulk costs about a penny. This diluted, yields ten pounds of medicinal acid, which, again sub-divided, gives 1,280 drachms or doses, rendering the same number of persons, when administered, approximately safe for one day and night. Asiatic cholera, when prevalent, principally implicates the poor, the heedless, and the destitute; but persons in opulent circumstances are not always exempt. Officers—speaking of military men—are less frequently affected than privates, but officers themselves do not always escape. A vast number of valuable lives of all classes have been sacrificed. The primary cause of cholera aside, I do not know any source for its propagation except contagion or infection; and, secondarily, the garments or bed-coverings which the sufferers have made use of, and the dejections which have passed from their persons.

In India, the sanitary arrangements, as here, are exceedingly unsatisfactory. I would recommend the universal adoption of earth-closets. Earth, properly dried and placed in elevated receptacles, will flow almost as freely as water, and can be used precisely in the same fashion.* The universal adoption of the earth-closet system would preserve a multitude of lives, and redound not less to moral than to physical well-being. The sinking of heart, the prostration, and the terror which the sudden invasion of Asiatic cholera is calculated to produce, and from which even the bravest cannot be said to be wholly exempt, are not to be described in words. The introduction of dilute sulphuric acid would prove not only an invaluable preservative from disease, but would constitute a moral support and encouragement of the highest importance.

Trusting that immediate telegraphic messages to every place where Asiatic cholera prevails may be the result of my communication.

* I recommend dried earth, pulverised, a hundred parts, sulphate of lime ten parts, sulphate of alumina five parts, sulphate of iron five parts, sulphuric acid five parts—all well blended together. Of this sanitary humus, as I would term it, thousands and tens of thousands of tons might be prepared in the dry season and laid past for use.

Home, Revenue and Agricultural Department, Medical, No. 11—591, dated Simla, the 20th November 1879.

COPY forwarded to Local Governments and Administrations, to the Foreign and Military Departments, and to the Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, with a request that the orders of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India may be complied with.

By Order of the Governor General of India in Council,

F. C. DAUKES,
Under-Secretary to the Govt. of India.

To—The Chief Commissioner of Coorg.

Mysore Government Press, Bangalore.—1880.